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SUBJECT: KURDISH TRIBAL OPINION OF COALITION WORSENING OVER
SECURITY?

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KIRKUK 00000065 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Scott Dean, Regional Coordinator (Acting), Reo
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The leader of the influential Baradusti tribe in the Kurdish region of Iraq described the Iraqi security situation as worse today than during Saddam Hussayn's era. The continued violence throughout Iraq is denting Kurdish popular opinion of the Coalition. The U.S. presence, however, is keeping the Kurdish region from dividing. Nepotism - "a cultural issue" - and the fear of losing supporters between the two Kurdish parties are key components fueling the corruption problem in northern Iraq. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) This is second in a series of interviews with leaders of four influential tribes in the Kurdish region of Iraq, including the Harki (REFTEL), Baradusti, Surchi, and Zebari. On March 9, IPAO's met with Shaykh Hussayn Lolani, leader of the Baradusti tribe. The majority of Baradusti tribal members today live in Arbil city, due to Saddam Hussayn's decision in 1978 to displace this tribe from its territorial homeland in Lolan - an area in Iraq that borders both Iran and Turkey.

Security First; Repatriation Second

13. (C) Shaykh Hussayn identified security as the most important issue to his tribe, saying that improved security would result in safer transportation routes to the rest of Iraq and improve the Kurds' access to services. He said that when the security situation improved, he hoped his tribe would be allowed to return to Lolan. Hussayn feared that the PKK, PUK, or KDP might kill his people if they tried to return before then.

Kurdish Independence-Western Support Key

14. (C) Shaykh Hussayn said he was optimistic about the merger of the two Kurdistan Regional Governments. When asked for his views on national leadership, Hussayn said he backed those officials who supported a national unity government but lamented that he had yet to see anyone who fitted that bill. He said he favored having the U.S. carve out a Kurdish state from the territory occupied by Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Hussayn added that the result could not be any worse than the current

security and political situation. He remarked that Saddam Hussayn's predecessor, Ahmad Hassan al-Baqr, a close friend to his father, had said that a Kurdish state would be possible only if the western powers created one. Hussayn added that if the U.S. left the region, the natural result would be a divided Kurdistan.

Kurdish Public Opinion on Coalition Worsening

¶15. (C) Hussayn argued that in 2003 most Iraqis admired the Coalition, but the continued violence and political chaos had caused them to change their view. He contrasted, for example, the dangers of traveling to Baghdad today with those during Saddam's time. Hussayn said that the average Kurd blamed the U.S. for the Al Askariyah mosque bombing in Samarra, because most Kurds believed the U.S. was powerful enough to prevent such bombings from occurring if it wanted.

Kurdish Region Plagued by Corruption, Nepotism

¶16. (C) Shaykh Hussayn said that more should have been done to prevent corruption in northern Iraq. Nepotism was the primary problem - but that "it was a cultural issue of trying to help your own first." He argued that religion should never be used to resolve a conflict because religion only exacerbated problems. The rivalry between the KDP and PUK also allowed corruption to flourish in northern Iraq. For example, Hussayn said, KDP leaders would keep members they knew were corrupt because if the KDP dismissed those persons, the PUK would hire them to work against the KDP. Hussayn told us that he hoped that by merging the two KRG's, jobs would be distributed through the government instead of the parties.

Baradusti Tribal History, Relations

¶17. (SBU) The Baradusti tribe originally came from around Iran

KIRKUK 00000065 002.2 OF 002

before it migrated to Lolan. Geographically, Shaykh Hussayn identified his neighbors as Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, the Balak tribe to the south and the Barzani tribe to the west. In 1946, the Iraqi king commissioned the Baradusti tribe to protect the Iranian border from smuggling operations.

¶18. (SBU) The Baradusti tribe consists of approximately 10,000 families throughout Iraq, Iran, and Turkey; however only 4,000 families live in Iraq. After Saddam evicted the Baradustis from Lolan in 1978, tribal members resettled in Arbil city, where the majority of Baradustis live today.

Regional Alliances

¶19. (SBU) Shaykh Hussayn said his tribe had closer relations with the KDP than the PUK because most Baradusti members lived in KDP areas. He added that the Baradusti tribe also had relations with the PUK, but those ties had weakened since the PUK administration left Arbil in 1996. Hussayn said Presidents Talabani and Barzani attended his father's funeral and had met with Hussayn at his house.

¶110. (SBU) Shaykh Hussayn said the Baradustis had played a peacemaker or arbitrator role between the major Kurdish parties, adding that his tribe had protected both the KDP and PUK from each other at different times. Hussayn's father once told KDP founder in Iraq Mullah Mustafa that the Baradustis always would fight beside him, except against Talabani and the PUK.

Relations With Turkey

¶111. (SBU) Shaykh Hussayn said his tribe had no relations with the governments in Tehran or Ankara, however, the Baradustis

engaged in a small amount of trade, visited extended family, and settled disputes with Kurds in Turkey. Hussayn claimed the Baradusti tribe did not have a political connection to the PKK, despite the presence of PKK bases in his tribal area.

Women

¶12. (SBU) According to Shaykh Hussayn, there is no tribal education requirement for women on either curriculum or attendance. He said his tribe traditionally placed importance on setting up schools for religious (and other) education when public schools were closed. Women work as teachers, but female tribe members do not take on professional occupations such as engineering, architecture, or business. He said there were no Baradusti women in positions of influence in either business or politics.

Biographic Note:

¶13. (SBU) Shaykh Hussayn, an independent on the KDP list, is a member of the Kurdistan National Assembly. His cousin is on the Arbil Provincial Council. Hussayn and most Baradustis are Sufi Muslims. Hussayn wore a black and white kafia and dressed in the traditional garb of a Kurdish shaykh. Both his father and grandfather were influential tribal leaders. Hussayn heads a tribal council of representatives and frequently meets with senior Baradusti family members in his home. He said he has not announced his successor, but he has three sons. Hussayn does not speak English.

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